

SAULTERS, ANDREW, M.F.A. The Impractical Man. (2008)  
Directed by Prof. Stuart Dischell. 40 pp.

A collection of poems written during two years of study in the MFA writing program at UNC Greensboro. Poems concern mechanisms, vanishings, and appearances.

# THE IMPRACTICAL MAN

by

Andrew Saulters

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro  
2008

Approved by

Prof. Stuart Dischell  

---

Committee Chair

© 2008 Andrew Saulters

## APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Members \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Returned .....	1
<i>Splendid Idea I Had Once, When I Felt Spring</i> .....	2
Grandfather engine .....	4
Transverse orientation .....	5
To the girl in California .....	6
“No Limit Soldiers” .....	7
Children’s letters to the President at an estate sale .....	8
Library genealogy room .....	9
Father truck .....	10
Afternoon in the park .....	12
Lunch break strike .....	13
Terrestrial dusk, and the man who stands .....	14
Transfiguration containing no ash .....	16
Diarist .....	17
The naming of Blood Mountain .....	18
Uncertainty on a bridge across the sound .....	21
Of the river and the river town .....	22
The end of winter .....	23
Son machine .....	24
Late hours .....	25
The sound the universe hears .....	26
The second daughter .....	27

The first daughter .....	29
Night drive ending near a stable .....	30
The philosophy professor turns into air .....	31
Mr. Six poems .....	33
Mr. Six to the Impractical Man .....	33
Day at the beach .....	34
Enumeration at the end of day .....	35
Quarry .....	36
Of the ocean near the ocean .....	37
Regards .....	39

## Returned

Come back saying old words like foreign ones,  
stone-heavy and full of smoke, and you could be  
right: it's your season of manumission,  
personal autumn when all to do is  
undo hometown education. But if  
your drifts of crisp forgetting were leaves,  
no child would play there. They're crushed already,  
for bagging. While you were gone picking up  
new gestures, birds came for once to your yard.  
Now they circle, who recognize your eyes.  
You've come back with a swagger step, and no friend  
can tell it from bravado or a welcome limp.  
They noticed you left when you returned.  
They want to slap the new glasses out of your dismissive hand.

*Splendid Idea I Had Once, When I Felt Spring*

The human-powered flight machine spans  
his house—airfoil sketches all across  
the floor, aspect ratio  
calculations written on walls,  
propeller plans hanging full scale  
beside the bed. He's learned to draft  
to place curves exact. He's  
training his legs to find what horsepower  
he contains, what pedaled thrust  
he can make, how much lift,  
how much weight he can hold.

The human-powered flight machine has no name,  
not *The Mary Anne* anymore, not since she left  
saying, I can't live with an airplane,  
and he said, Not  
an airplane, but a human-powered flight machine,  
and how the door slammed behind her.  
*Noonlight, Solstice, Wheel Within Wheel,*  
no name pleased him but  
*Splendid Idea I Had Once, When I Felt Spring*  
*Come Down To Me On A Hillside,* the one  
too long for him to remember whole.

The human-powered flight machine has no body.  
His friends stopped asking



when he would build it, so often  
was his answer Soon, Soon.  
From the hillside at noon he tosses balsa miniatures  
of new designs in the wind. The way  
they curve above the trees,  
how they disappear  
into the sun, it is not what it should be.  
No matter how high they rise,  
it is never right.

## Grandfather engine

After he died I broke into his workshop.  
It was a grayed shack, windows slatted shut,  
stacked with used-up work shirts and kids' toys.  
Beside the tool box and the wrenches gone to rust,  
in a crescent crack of sunlight through the roof,  
sat the engine, palmprints in dried grease,  
planned restoration put off for good.  
I could smell his illness in the air,  
a dementia from before I was born.  
Each hanging light bulb chain snapped when I pulled.  
I could not budge the engine toward the door.  
In the slight light, I tried to loosen bolts and  
pry off manifolds, but the tools slipped, stripped  
the metal. I would carry it out piece by piece  
if I could. In daylight I would study  
each bearing, shaft and bore until I learned  
the logic, the assembly, the control of it.

## Transverse orientation

Studying the moth mired headfirst in wax  
that liquefies beneath the singeing limbs,  
the child thinks it had wanted  
the heat of the flame, its flickering.

Before the moth's wings caught  
in the candle, its body was only motion.  
Curved flight flapping spiral in  
was the face the child saw.

At night it navigated by lunar light  
too dim for sight but bright enough for knowing up.  
The moth flew faceless until it found the candle  
in the open window, the child watching the glow.

## To the girl in California

In shade at the rim of the park,  
with his textbooks and notebooks  
and his glasses so dirty I don't know  
how he studied, your friend  
mentioned you and stayed with you, how after finals  
he will invite you to surf, though he knows

you have waves enough out west and  
would not hold *no* against you. He knows  
if you visit him it would be for the coast,  
but he said if you come he will say what he has not  
through years of emails and phone talks  
like ship-to-shore signals, brief

but bright. It is possible to take the mud  
of a belief and sculpt it into a work  
beyond description. He did not proclaim to me  
your beauty, great as innumerable suns,  
did not praise your laugh, lilting  
as the first of spring, whatever that might mean,

but neither did he say your name.  
Girl in California whom he will not call California Girl,  
when he asks, answer soft but clear.

## “No Limit Soldiers”

First time I heard the phrase,  
it was still the nineties—the name  
of a rap group that didn’t last.

Now, the nickname of a reserve regiment  
printed on the jackets of two women  
headed home after training. Three in the morning,

they chatted and photographed themselves  
in fatigues. Everyone else in the bus station slept.  
But for the jackets with those words

curving around a skull,  
I might have thought they wandered in  
from some costume party. I wanted

to believe they were old  
as they sounded in their thick boots  
that stomped no matter how light they walked—

or younger, like the friends  
joined to my first memories of the phrase.  
Just not in between. I could not

imagine the name in them,  
their bodies full of bullets but still fighting.

## Children's letters to the President at an estate sale

Wide and wrinkled  
like wrecked cars,  
the papers, gray and  
grid-ridged, were fibrous,

cotton, homemade—  
maybe a teacher's project  
kept career-long,  
or an obscure collection stored

with albums of two-faced dimes.  
All of them, full of birds,  
clouds, raying light, blended  
together except one: a girl

in thick red crayon,  
arms flexed, feet firm  
on land she labeled *Texas*.  
Behind her, a crosshatch

of chain-link fence  
across the whole page,  
and *Remove illegals now*  
in thin, precise letters.

## Library genealogy room

Off the unlit hallway where children learn  
not to explore after trying all doors  
and finding them locked, in the first room,  
on flaking stacks of graveyard maps  
and college yearbooks from thirty years back,

on index cards bound in blocks by dried out  
rubber bands, lie the dead of my county  
from first death to now, thin in data  
and all out of order. It was my job  
one summer to set them straight, names,

birthdays and death days recorded  
in minute mortician script. On some cards,  
notes on cause: *hole, fishing accident,*  
*shot by son*. On others, no names, only  
*If. of Sullivan, If. of Cox,*

or just *If.*, shorthand for a delivery scene:  
two parents, a quiet body, and  
remission of the planned name, the unsortable  
decision this would not be remembered,  
this is not what names are for.

## Father truck

He ditched it in the lake  
then the lake dried up.  
Twenty feet gone

in a burnt year. I climbed down  
into the lakebed's cupped palms.  
Sunk up to the floorboard

in cracked clay, the browned body  
reflected no sunlight and smelled  
in the heat like ferrous sweat.

When grandfather passed it down  
to him, the engine stalled too often  
to be trusted. He tried to fix it

until he thought every part suspicious  
but perfect. Grandfather went  
to hospital for good, and he drove it

all the way into the water.  
He kicked to the surface and watched  
the unsolved form darken.

I broke a window with a rock  
and climbed into the cabin,  
swollen too brittle for doors



to open. I forced my key  
into the orange-ringed slot  
and tried the ignition, and the engine,

fused with itself down  
to the chambers, the engine  
that did not stall when he came

to drown the truck for inevitable flaws,  
that engine was still turning  
with immobile inertia.

## Afternoon in the park

My sister did not notice when  
the ribbon loosened from her wrist  
and the balloon left.

We watched it rise,  
the ribbon shining, sometimes  
in the right light, wavering

as if evaporating, and she asked  
*Can you still see it*  
once, and again, before she looked away,

and though I could see it, I looked away,  
and we left, both of us tired from looking  
all day for a place to hold her wedding.

## Lunch break strike

*April 2006, Atlanta*

Carpenters are walking at the Biltmore again—  
in gloves, in tool belts, they're there for lunch hour  
then gone. I had my camera  
when I first saw them two weeks ago. I didn't  
take pictures. They walked like cardboard cut-outs might,  
rigid left, right, and they held their signs up, Fair Pay  
For Overtime Work, to say what they were not chanting.

A man in sunglasses and hard hat watching  
from the line's end smiled at me and extended his arm,  
an invitation to photograph the men  
as if he were leading the strike instead of allowing it.  
Someone snapped shots from a balcony  
as if a few pictures of Mexican carpenters walking in flat circles  
could launch a newspaper career.

The news is full of protests, but I could not take pictures of it.  
Not of the foreman behind sunglasses,  
glancing from them to his watch  
with ten minutes to one, to the needed work again.  
Not of you saying over dinner  
that they have it easy these days, that in a year  
we will have forgotten anything happened.

## Terrestrial dusk, and the man who stands

Terrestrial dusk, and the man who stands  
against the wall is the one who reads  
old newspapers on a hill,  
the one early night birds set their courses by.  
When he wore blue canvas, it was said  
denim would suit him better. Dressed now  
all in denim, it is said he is not the sort  
to go about all clad in denim.  
There is no work in him, they say.

Flat noontime, and the man who stands  
against the wall is the one who paces wide  
in rain, composing cadences for wind  
running through dried grass. When he whistles  
he seems to chance dry through the storm  
like a leaf beneath a leaf. Even when  
he pauses silent in the open  
rain misses him, they say,  
jogging through puddles at lunch hour.

Morning stretches out, and the man  
who stands against the wall is the one  
who stands against the wall,  
watching the day gather from the white  
and blue side of the burnt-up corner store.  
When he smokes, his gloved fingers

do not move. When he does not smoke, his gloved hands hang hollow at his sides. It is said he does not remove them, even when, hands in pockets, he has removed them.

## Transfiguration containing no ash

Let us begin again where we left off, I  
before the congregation crossed with ashes,  
counting them recognizing one by one

my clean-foreheaded doubt, and you,  
more abstract than math, than one  
divided by zero, were absent from us all.

I would rather you, corporeal, had looked me  
in the eye and turned away three hundred times  
than watched them release their trust, serial.

I didn't want you to tear off your tetragrammaton,  
your *is* and your *is not*, but to reveal each and all  
of our faces. I wasn't asking you to take back

your winnow logic that restrains compassion,  
the gift knife that keeps you and I apart. Just  
follow me this once, and we'll show everyone

is everyone else. Come with me and we'll  
go down, father, way, way down.

## Diarist

Around him, an arc of typewriters. Spares.  
Details of dinner, a light bulb replaced,  
A trip to the john, he records it all,  
Records his recording. Reading of a man  
Who typed from *one* to *one million*  
In words, sixteen years,  
Paper stacked six feet,  
He wonders how high his own ledgers measure.  
They fill a room no one enters,  
Pages pasted with pressed leafs, bills, letters  
Addressed to Occupant.  
He would tape down pictures  
If he still traveled, notes to self  
If he didn't transcribe them first.  
Each week he calls everyone he knows,  
Types down what they're doing.

## The naming of Blood Mountain

The gas station man tells stories  
Of an Indian battle at Slaughter Gap.  
It happened right there, he says, pointing  
To a dip in the ridge the florist insists is called Neels.  
She claims the name is from rhododendrons.  
The junk man on his bench next door  
Grumbles, It's a joke from a comic book,  
And fumbles through a comic book,  
Half-ripped. In the junk store,  
The newest man in town picks through items  
And says nothing.

\*

On the trail. Treetops  
Close enough to reach for  
But too far to touch.

The slope is all fallen limbs,  
Pine needles, sounds  
Of hidden living things.

Someone might have lived there once,  
Probably someone has walked there,  
But not today, not me.

\*



If I could find the water  
I hear purling down the mountain  
And watch it flow for weeks,  
I would not see it deepen  
Its rut in the rock. At my scale,  
The mountain stings  
Like a hand cut by a rope too thin  
And quick to catch, and water  
Is someone fallen from a fair ride,  
Hitting every strut. How long  
To imagine this not human.

\*

Smoke rises from a fold  
In the forested foothills. Stumps  
Burning out of a new field.

Someone is watching those fires  
Waiting to rest. When  
That farmhand douses the flames,

The mountain will be there for him to say,  
I ache like the mountain, and add  
To its years of names his own.

\*

At the top sit the junk man and  
The newest man, friendless for months.  
The recluse says to the outcast, Trust me,  
You don't need people to live out here.

If I say to the mountain, I know  
The history of your name, it would  
Answer like the outcast,  
No, Not nearly.

## Uncertainty on a bridge across the sound

Miniature in coastal wind and morning light,  
my friend in the lawn chair held aloft by balloons  
glides west. She began her mission days ago,  
cutting the last rope after she gave me  
her rifle and instructions for how to start  
the landing. Rising silently, she kept  
speaking to me as if I were still beside her.  
Altitude has made her the smallest visible thing.  
She has not called out for me to shoot  
through any balloons. No longer does she look  
for me to check that I have followed her.

## Of the river and the river town

He knew nothing from before the river.  
Slow wheeling and flat, he did not think *river*  
in the carry of the water. There were no ideas  
until the sun behind a cloud, how a tree shifts  
in its blotted shadow, the capture of light.

Rain came and he drank. Fruit fell and he ate.  
He discerned the lengths of days and years and lost  
count as they slid away, believing nothing  
ever stopped, only faded in and out of stars.

When he saw two men on a dock  
did not see himself in them, their movements  
more like a shrike banking than the worm it spots  
in the grass. When they drew him in with nets  
he tried to fight. When they brought him naked

before the town he would have thrown down  
the gray work clothes they gave and fled, but first  
they took him to a hill to see the end of the river,  
how it emptied into a sea, its current dragging

into the open water a string of people  
who floated on their backs like fallen leaves  
until they folded into waves. One man  
said to the other, Now he knows he owes us.

## The end of winter

One man running down the street  
on the last cold night of the season,  
leather jacket and rotary legs  
converging into one form  
in the distance as his footfalls fade,  
no one in sight ahead or behind  
even if he was looking.

## Son machine

I walked along a dirt road.  
The sun was low enough to make  
long shadows, but made none.  
Beside the road, a lake with no  
reflections. Stepping down to it,  
I saw beneath the surface a vast machine.  
Gears and chains and shafts between turbines.  
Strips of focused light from ripples stroked  
the mechanism, inert. It spread wide as the lake.  
Rust ridged up from every surface and dissolved  
into tree trunks and grass out of the lake bottom,  
gone iron. I imagined myself at the bottom,  
in the nest of the engine, looking up  
through the membrane of water  
at the streaky world, waiting  
to enter it, my body.

## Late hours

Jabbed from my night cynicism  
by coffee and coffee and not enough water,  
I began to hope the world was only people,  
down to the crispness of air in water, people  
more like peculiar relatives  
than white-eyed figures of myths,  
people to love as if it were a word that can be said  
to anyone so like oneself, to anyone at all,  
people, because my body was filling from the lungs out,  
discretely, until I believed I could breathe all things,  
or say to a stranger, Goodnight,  
and guarantee to him the night, people  
until I heard a motorcycle rip into  
high idle then stall, a man in a backyard shouting  
*What are you doing? Go away,*  
metal crunching to the ground and a woman  
gasping a name, then the man yelling  
*See what you've done* and riding away  
in a cloud. I saw her sitting  
where he had pushed her down.  
She did not watch him go, did not  
gather the hair from her face.

## The sound the universe hears

as the wax and ash bead  
of itself reworks itself  
is not like the whistling of thin  
quickness heard whirling around  
mountains or the convex and hard  
lots of backroads gas stations,  
nor like any sort of silence,  
oil barrel hollow or still  
as before and after sudden  
country death, stargazing  
man struck by meteor,  
nor astronomical,  
the hiss of glistening suncores  
becoming diamond, but more  
like this man I watch by window,  
walking home from work near midnight  
to do more work, laundry work,  
dinner work, 'Tonight maybe  
I will make the car work'—  
not the beat of his steps, his breath,  
but the passage of cars  
down the highway, an ebbing  
I hear because of the long-note song  
he does not sing,  
the music his tiredness contains.



## The second daughter

Ellen, our family has no children or parents,  
just us, floating like fog. When you tell the story  
of mother's last day, you do not say enough. Go back  
to our first years, to the army town and the army  
families shuffling through like records in a beat up jukebox—

the houses of neighbors known through windows  
collapsed together as you remade the neighborhood  
in your mind, pasting down layered maps of names  
until everyone you could know became  
like ink, paper, atlas: replaceable.

I cannot remember enough of the house we had,  
not more than colors and sometimes her face in rooms.  
Do not revise what you keep. It is ours. When you tell  
the story of your car breaking, you dwell too much on the wait  
for a tow. The tale is in how you used to watch rain swell

the river. It's in how mother taught you  
to play bridge and you played no one, how you  
observed from the widow next door  
the art of nostalgia, fixing rooms  
for a time that never came.

Don't don't don't complain, frayed-wire sister,  
about your job fixing copy at the paper  
and your bled-out correction pens. You've coasted,

a water droplet on a leaf, and paused too little  
in all the wrong spots. No one knows which

goodbyes need saying, but the future does not stop shrinking.  
When you tell the story of her last day I don't want  
to hear you ranting roadside at the car. Tell me you listened  
for her breath to come mixed with wind. Tell me  
you saw the day age, the sun sliding irrevocable.

## The first daughter

In morning, chimneys breathing smoke don't stop  
to sigh *Dissolve, dissolve*, the chant of night.

Because it is early, it seems even  
the clouds will go somewhere today. At work  
these days grammar is tough to fix, refix,  
so many ways for words to fall correct.

At least it keeps me reading news, I said  
once, but not anymore. At night I walk  
the railroad tracks, and the wind says to me,  
*Soon you will be more near to End than Start.*

I say, I know, You always tell me that.

In leaves blown across the ground, the wind  
says, *And it will be this simple.* Believe me,  
it isn't that I do not hear them speak.

I started long ago a game of chess:  
myself at sunup playing white against  
myself with black, moving at night.

To give the evening self a chance, I try  
to lose the moves that come in sleep,  
and do, but still I can't forget  
enough dreams: in doorknobs, reflected clocks;  
and riverside, you calling for me  
to come down from my burning oak.

I only meant to pass the time—now  
just the kings remain, circling.

## Night drive ending near a stable

I tell myself I came to see its shadow drape across the field,  
its leaning walls and rafters overcome with vines.

In light from passing cars my shadow stretches and recedes.  
I tell myself I came here. I say, You are not disappearing.

## The philosophy professor turns into air

*for Martin Robinson*

Prolate and featureless against the sky,  
the body sliding from the jet's tail  
reminded me of a staged bombing  
I saw once at an airshow,  
the stream of falling dummy shells.

I could not understand why  
he wanted it this way, burial at air,  
thrown from the back of a Fokker 28,  
but his will was exact: *no box,*  
*no bag, just clothes. Come see.*

I do not know how he expected us to watch.  
Few did: daughter, son, sister, I. His wife  
was not with us in the early morning,  
tracing the arc of that gray  
top-heavy thing. She waited

in the radio room with grandchildren.  
The radio man stood watching outside the door.  
He had not been invited, but approached  
when we unloaded the hearse on the tarmac.  
He agreed not to report us if we let him see.

It fell for a long time. As I marvelled  
that the shirt remained on the body,

wind ripped it off. It whipped away  
in pieces while the arms remained in place.  
It was not free,

the body. Something inside bound it  
to itself, would not allow arms to ratchet  
or let legs flail. The body would not do  
what I think he would have tried,  
would not force the arms out

into the sun and air, the brightening  
clouds that made his body  
filament. I did not watch him  
and think, He was my teacher—  
I recalled his favorite lesson,

the theory of Anaximenes  
that all things are made of air.  
My memories of him began to leave  
as I felt in my chest the start  
of a long and slow rigidity,

until nothing of him remained but the lesson,  
my failure to imagine him finally striking ground,  
the pure tomb of his will.

## Mister Six poems

### *Mister Six to the Impractical Man*

Listen fellow, we're all young and jobless  
and full of debt once, believing our days  
will billow in us like wind in clouds  
and carry us along a long while.

But that's kid life, that is to neglect  
your number. Don't let it go fellow,  
don't let the letters gather with you  
like dust sickness left unhealed for years.

Keep away the letter writers,  
men of figures who said on their papers,  
*It is not for you to be debtful here—*

*Go down from this place.*

On a morning outside light they will  
arrive with trucks and crates and arms,  
quick as the end of a nested dream.

Fight them and every one in your number  
of friends will deny you. Fight your debt,  
and your fingernails will split  
cracks from the quick will track up your fingers,  
each bone will break and bond and bust again, and though  
you will rest your body down and rise as if you hadn't,  
though you will become difference, friend,  
you must pay for what you take  
until you have nothing to pay for anymore.

*Day at the beach*

Brought to the sea when I was small, I was  
taught how to sit in the shallows of the tide  
and bear against the salt and foam of the waves,  
tide's impersonal shoves to shore. All  
noon we played with the sea's refusal of us,  
no one speaking of refusal in the waves, the way  
the water makes wind and sand from air and rock,  
those things it cannot expel from itself. It does  
not want, so does not want to be alone, but  
everything given to the sea returns to shore.  
Stones become shells, boats become boards, we  
become bones. Nothing can remain beside it,  
so evenly does it own and owe nothing.  
When it tried to knock us back to shore,  
it did not wish it, no one said it, but it serves  
the ones it keeps, the ones that stay.



*Enumeration at the end of day*

It does not happen that you forget,  
that the days cover what you do  
like earth that swallows houses fallen down.  
Forgetting goes  
until there is no memory  
that does not return to you like an exile  
who has learned disguises  
but comes with only weapons—

At night, piano notes from the highest window of a friend  
with whom you do not speak, and your footsteps  
steady on. The slow sense  
of all friends become this, while at the door,  
at hours, knocking and knocking  
and the shouting of your last name.  
On a bicycle in a thorough winter,  
the dry whine of chain and gear  
all the way down the road you did not think would end.

They will not end, your memories  
of the unholy smear of your one voice in that stillness—  
let them last.

## *Quarry*

My plan was a wish singing itself prayerful.  
At night I said it, Come time, I will find what is mine.  
And to the sand I said it, Come earth, and every soil  
will be full of my riches. To gulls flapping out to sea, I said it  
as best I could, Come wings, and I will depart in every direction.  
At the edge of waves, shore going out under me, I said it  
as it cannot be done, Come each arm and leg,  
each body I have, and I will do all things  
to all things. With my skin come unlayered at the ridges  
and the bandage about my head come undone and I flaring  
with all kinds of sight, everyone forgotten as I walk,  
each name I have lost, my quarry, narrow and becoming,  
through each medium, I will find you.

*Of the ocean near the ocean*

At a midnight station stop you say to some stranger, I'm headed to the beach.  
He says, I'm unfixable sick, my family quit me quick, Can you pay  
my ride away? You hand him some dough, you keep your face plain.  
He slumps on his bench like a rot stump getting full of dirt.  
Stay long enough, his head will cave in. This is what happens.

To the boy across the bus, runaway son of a reverend resigned in sin,  
you say, I'm headed to the sea because I've never gone alone.  
See that broken line down the middle of the road, he asks. That's alone.  
He'll watch those stripes pass through headlights all night,  
he'll be forgetting himself for good. And to the man who calls himself

the unluckiest man, whose parents demanded rent at fifteen,  
whose quick marriage broke under insanity of wife, her eyes  
flicking like a cut artery, you say to him as the sun is rising  
on the last mile, I'm headed to the winter sea—  
And he'll say, That locust lust ain't just in your head, Get away from me.

When you arrive at the ocean to begin your days of mutter prayers  
that will open a pocket in time for you and no one will hear it zip shut,  
when you wander out in search of a wisdom seat to sit in  
like quitting work is earning back your time,  
you'll stay in one of two ways. Get to know the metal man

who went deaf under his headset but still carries his wand  
up and down his stripe of coast. Get to know the woman  
standing at the tip of the waves, nest of papers to her chest,  
phone in hand. Meet her quick. The water will roll to her socked toes,  
and she will look at you like she does not know what to do.

## *Regards*

No place I looked could bear my looking.  
They fled me like loose leaves in a hilltop wind.  
The delta went to mud and water and weeds,  
and all the curious shadows in the field unwound  
from the dried grasses, if I approached. Pebbles  
glittering in a low stream became only light,  
and that light became an angle and a thirst.

I made once to sleep in a punched-in-the-face shed  
that leaned across a flat plate of land that resisted me.  
There were shacks like that all along the road,  
tumbled all like love letters from a moving car,  
and no interior for me. I bedded down  
in some deep meadow and when I woke  
a man sat against a tree across from me,

doing and undoing his fingers and quiet, watching.  
He spoke nothing the time I took to leave,  
and followed me out with eyes. Nothing  
was open, nothing given to be known. The men  
on the store porch kept every place from me  
when they refused to give directions,  
except for a price. The woman at the pasture gate

was every woman at every pasture gate, a shadow  
watching me pass. At night I sang and nothing came.  
The man sitting in his car in the gas pump parking lot  
heard it, his ears turning his head, but the rest of him  
turned back. The officer camping out a two-lane  
intersection heard it, and made sure in his rearview mirror  
that I passed on. The motion lights on house fronts

did not hear it, but lit as I walked by, rattling  
the last coins in my pocket. Fields became towns  
until the town was the one I knew. Under orange lights  
a car drove past, backed up and drove past again. No  
words. Anyone might have been back of the dark window.  
Come day, I recognized everyone I saw. No one knew me.  
They asked my name. What it was I did for a living.